



SALABHANJIKA

Novel

Indramani Jena



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Edited by:

Raju Samal

ବ୍ଲାକ୍‌ଇଗଲ୍ ବୁକ୍ସ

ଭୁବନେଶ୍ୱର, ଓଡ଼ିଶା

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Prologue

Kumarigiri, the first maiden hill of ancient Kalinga, looks graceful with old architectural embellishments. The faded and decaying art attracts historians and archaeologists and reflects the ancient society in decorative detail.

The British occupied Orissa from Marahattas in 1803 and started an archaeological survey of the temple town Bhubaneswar and the hills of Khandagiri, Udayagiri and Dhauri. In 1837, the Hathigumpha inscription was lithoed and made available to the most adept decipherers of the nation. It took fifty long years to get some literal interpretation.

1885 witnessed the publication of the encoded old Brahmi script of the inscription that provided the identity and limits of erstwhile *Kalinga*. It authenticated the historical record of brave *Kalinga* vs. *Piyadarsi* Ashok in the thirteenth rock edict. Written documents from Sri Lanka and the Far East had the '*Holing*' or '*Kling*' nomenclature. Deciphering Chinese and Malaysian documents clarified the fact. The shreds of evidence confirmed that Odisha was then the Kalinga with *Ayur Mahameghavahana Kharavela*, the Emperor of *Kalinga*, and the architecture of *Kumarigiri* lauded the supremacy of his power and strength. Decoding the *Hathigumpha* inscription maintains the temporal flow chart of ancient Indian history and uncovers a dark period to a great extent.

After a thorough study, the archaeological society conceived that *Kumarigiri* and *Kumaragiri* were much more than shelters for Jain monks. If somebody would ask about the existence of a massive educational institution of a religious nature about 2300 years from now, it was here on these hills where the heart of the kingdom of Kalinga throbbed. *Kumarigiri* and many women figures in the caves sway our thoughts toward emphasizing women's education, arts, crafts, dance and drama in those times.

The rock is ornately carved specially to form beautiful caves, which lead to many secret pathways. Plenty of rare gems are believed to be hidden in the cave's interiors. It is said that the British, after deciphering the *Hathigumpha* inscription, could get a clue that the hills had hosted the wealthiest rulers of *Kalinga*. With the hope of hidden treasure, with dynamite. They blasted one cave closed from all sides.

They could not trace any wealth, but to their astonishment, they found the closed cavity of the cave had elaborately been embellished with sculptural friezes. This folktale has continued for generations, and specifically, the octogenarian people of the village have mouthed it.

This *Salabhanjika* is inscribed on the eastern door of Jaya-Bijaya cave at the entrance of the Udayagiri hill, erstwhile *Kumarigiri*. She appears pretty graceful with half-closed eyes and depicts the whole history of *Kharavela* in twelve moonlighted midnights during the centenary

celebration of *Kalinga Samaroh*. The events occur on full moon nights with a mystic spell of light and shadow made by *Dishidharikas*, the lamp bearers of rock-cut art.

The remnants of Hathigumpha Inscription, which reminds us of that epoch, show that the drooping tree is destined to put forth new leaves under archaeological survey. The growth of its wings had a bird's eye view of the facts and figures, arts and architectural focus to visualize the society and leadership in that golden period of history.

Everyone conversant with pieces of evidence of Kharavela's time will easily discern by what author or from which inscription or rock art the minor details have been derived, and I am not interested in interrupting the narrative course of the book and spoiling the pleasure of a large class of readers. The romantic traits that I have attributed to Emperor Kharavela are a cosmic power for a decade, a theatrical talent manifestation for two decades and a cultural icon throughout millennia. One of the most arduous tasks I have ever set myself was constructing his wave of romance within himself, an ocean of love. The social and cultural petroglyphs upon the maiden hill speak volumes for brevity, and to impress the reader, the narrative flows straight from my heart.

Through the episodes narrated, the readers will vicariously experience the presence of Emperor Kharavela the moment they go through the book.

Indramani Jena,
Samaroh, 128, Dumuduma (A),
Khandagiri, Bhubaneswar-30
Mobile – 9438007509

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Characters in this Novel:

1. *Kalingadhipati* (Emperor of Kalinga) – Kharavela, 2. Chief Queen of Kalinga – Dhusi (Dhruti), 3. Second Queen of Kalinga – Sindhula, 4. Prince (son of the Emperor) – Kudapasari (Kandarpashree), 5. Son of Prince Kandarpashree – Vaduka, 6. *Mahamat* (Chief Minister) – Nakiya, 7. *Padamulika* (Personal Assistant of the Emperor) – Kusuma, 8. *Kama* (Works Minister) – Kama (Khina, wife of Kama), 9. *Nagara Akhandansh* (The City Judge) – Bhuti, 10. Queen of Paithan – Nayanika, 11. Magadharaj (King of Magadha) – Bruhaspati Mitra, 12. Pandya King, Naga King,

1. *Salabhanjika* (the stony girl) – Pallabi Puspita, 2. *Dwarapalika* (the woman door keeper) – Suka Swagatika, 3. *Dishidharika* (the Lamp Bearer woman) – Jyotsna Dhabalika, Deepa Rasmita, 4. Assisting Characters – Alashpadma, Malati, Patara, Nandika, Sagarika, Lahari, Mohini, Binita, 5. Acharya and Religious Characters – Jatnasila, Gyanalokananda, Priyambada, Bicharapada, Kalingodbhaba, Brahmaputra, Siddhasampada, Kebalalakpa, Aparimeyananda, Kalpabigyani, 6. *Mahasenani* (Chief of Army) – Biraprasastha, 7. *Senapati* (General in Army) – Ranaprabara, Singhanandana, Manthansrestha, Ranatunga, Ranabhairaba, 8. Other Characters – Pandya King – Pandyan; Chola King – Utiyachera; Nagaraj – Nagaswarupa; King of Tamraparni – Ranachakra, Toshalisuta – Ekamraka, King of South Kalinga – Sagara Singha

Three Youth Invitees – Apariti, Abhirama and Pranabandhu

Chapter – 1:

Beginning at Midnight

Three friends belonged to the same village at the foothills of present Khandagiri and Udayagiri. The twin hills with the surrounding forest have a tremendous influence on the lifestyle of the residents. Even twelve years after independence, these three friends, Aparti from the Samal family, Pranabandhu from the Samantray family and Abhiram from the Barik family, cannot find employment after completing a college education.

Even after graduation, the trio was engaged in playful activity, amused themselves in a way characteristic of children, and spent most of the time playing cards at the village community centre. Seasons changed, so were the forests, and they, like children, went after wild and tasteful berries. They liked *nirash*, a pleasant and refined berry from the hard plants of the hills. When eaten, these blueberries produce a thick blue coating over the tongue, which remains stuck for at least a day. They habitually caught fish from the depthless stream of water overflowing from the village pond. They were fond of stories told by Chintamani, the principal storyteller of the village and the universal grandpa. No one knew when Chintamani, the outsider, first landed in their village. Still, it was sure that he had been accepted as a permanent resident and was affectionately known as everyone's grandpa.

One day, Chintamani said, "Oh, three young, why don't you all search for the herb Bhanrmari (that attracts and kills wasps) available in the hill's vegetation? There are two leprosy cases in our village. Every treatment has failed. There has been no cure for this cursed disease. I am afraid the disease may spread to many in the village. But there is a solution. The twin hills contain this rare herb that can cure leprosy."

Aparti asked, "Grandpa, can you exactly trace the location on the hill where we will search for this herb? How can we identify it?"

Grandpa answered, "It is a small bush with a creeper appearance that pulls in bees and wasps in large numbers. These insects are found dead around it in the morning every day. Identify and cut it sparing six inches from the ground. I will prepare patent medicinal cream out of it."

Abhirama queried, "Grandpa, we have been playing at every nook and corner of the hills and are well conversant with the berry plants of each type. I do not remember having ever encountered such a peculiar plant."

Grandpa informed, "You must have heard how three guys of our village spend whole nights scouting over the hills in search of gold *Yakkha*. You must know

that the rolling gold ball is like a living creature created from a huge mass of gold buried somewhere long ago. They had completed ten years of their nocturnal tour and now speak confidently that they have a trace of it and will be netted soon. It would be best to remember that one can't have much wealth from any other trade in the five villages surrounding the hills. The only way anybody becomes rich overnight is from such a mysterious gold ball."

Aparti added, "Grandpa, we have also heard the brother of milkman Madan Behera, who disclosed some secrets confided to him by the ascetics and was punished with sudden death."

"These promising hills are full of such myths. Their tranquil atmosphere attracts so many ascetics even now. We know that Mahima Gosain was enlightened from this soil. Great happenings in the past might not have been limited to Jainas and Emperor Kharavela alone. Nowadays, any tourist here is interested only in the sculptural works related to Kharavela. But residents feel proud of believing that Kharavela is still landing at full-moon nights in a decorated spacecraft, and many tourists also observe some unknown ascetics, with wooden sandals and water pots moving along the forest tracks of Khandagiri." The information was accidentally leaked from Grandpa.

Pranabandhu interfered, "Grandpa, whether these are true or fabricated?"

Grandpa replied, "I don't believe all this. But I am afraid of one thing: these hills harbour '*Danshani*', the flying poisonous snake. I dare not go to the hills unless it is midday. Some say they have seen it, but nobody can vividly describe the serpent. Many pretend to have seen it. There is no evidence of deaths from such snakebite."

All three uttered simultaneously, "Grandpa, will there be any danger if we go to the hilltop at midnight? Will there be any problem with the ghosts and wild animals?"

Grandpa jokingly remarked, "You three are the robust youths of the village. So many people roam about on the hill searching for the hidden treasure. It is a shame that you are afraid of ghosts and spirits. This place is consecrated and set apart for some sacred purpose. If you encounter someone, he will be none other than an ascetic in meditation. Last year, the archaeological department dug out a step pattern in front of Hathigumpha buried under the earth. That way, many mysteries have remained hidden here. Even though the Hathigumpha inscription reveals many things, many more remain unrevealed. Why don't you, the dynamic three, do something that has never been done before?"

Now fearless and determined, the three agreed to go to the hill at night to get the herb for leprosy cure. In addition, they will observe the nocturnal happenings. They decided to go there at midnight without informing anybody. They would start right from the community centre, where they sleep at night. They will quietly return to their place of sleep after completing the mission. They may carry some equipment with them for safety.

It was Buddha Purnima in May. The full moon was almost in the centre of the sky. They noticed their shadows, practically glued to their footsteps. The ambience was silent and windless. The trees and vegetation were in the lap of deep sleep like the people in the village. The shadows of the trees were motionless. Abhirama, the most courageous among them, whispered to hold the hands of one another and move in a concerted manner. This will ward off their fear and give them courage and confidence.

They reached the Udayagiri hill and climbed the short stairs to the courtyard in front of Hathigumpha. It was early summer midnight. A gentle breeze was blowing. Swaying bushes welcomed the draft with a dance of delight. Suddenly, the trio sensed a sweet fragrance wafting in the breeze. They looked up at the stone cave, which was without any vegetation. But the scent was of wild jasmine. The sense of olfaction perturbed their mind in apprehension. The grip of their enlaced palms became firm.

But their heart shuddered, and they could feel the tremor of their fingers. They apprehended that something very dreadful was imminent. They were looking everywhere with fear in their eyes.

Two human-shape shadows suddenly appeared and transformed into damsels, neatly dressed and fabulously ornamented. Gradually, their limbs started moving, and their faces became visible.

This was entirely unexpected. They were about to collapse. There was no way to escape. They never expected such an encounter on the lonely hill.

Of the two girls, one with a lamp stood nearer to the cave. All of a sudden, the lamp lit up. It illuminated the field of vision like daylight. The three young men were taken aback. They held each other's hands firmly to muster the courage to face the mysterious human forms.

The second girl smiled and indicated they were friendly and happy to have their presence. Without waiting for any reply, she said, "Dear guests, we are not new to you; you have seen both of us earlier. In this tense situation, you may not be able to recollect that."

She continued, "I am in my ambulatory shape emerging from the sculpture, *Salabhanjika*, the statue from the right entrance pillar of Jaya-Vijaya cave just below. My real name is Pallabi Puspita. The lamp-bearer accompanying me is *Dishidharika*, the sculpture on the middle column of Ganesh cave just behind us. We learned about your arrival and hurried to welcome you to our function.

"Our function is the 'Centenary Celebration of Kalinga Function by Emperor Kharavela'. You might know that Mahameghavahana Kharavela established Agrajina Risabhanatha on this Kumarigiri hill above Hathigumpha, rescuing him from Magadha. He also inscribed a brief history of his times with the help of the best stone inscribers and erudite Jaina scholars available in India. This was dedicated to the inhabitants of Kalinga on a day of a great festival known as

the Kalinga Kumarigiri Inaugural Festival. Lord Risabhanatha had graced the occasion for which that function is retrieved as an original show once every hundred years. It has a time specification, twelve full moon nights of the year, starting at midnight and ending before the day dawns.

"All sculptural beings come out alive from their stone forms to play their role, as they did in the first inaugural ceremony. All the episodes of the golden era under Kharavela are reenacted sequentially in the moonlighted night. Kalingadhipati Kharavela leads it. All the events of history may be forgotten, but the association of Mahameghavahana Kharavela with Kumarigiri Hill will be remembered forever. The relationship is as permanent as the engraved inscription on the facades of Hathigumpha.

"Although confined in the stone sculptures, we have celebrated this Kalinga Festival for twenty-two centuries. Over time, our spoken language has transformed into yours due to our continued contact with you. We invite you to all our future celebrations on these full moon nights. You will have the opportunity to see your glorious past.

"Although we are stone girls in the guise of *Salabhanjika*, *Dishidharika*, *Dwarapalika*, *Banshibadika*, *Swagatika*, and *Nrutyarata* in real life, we were the representative pattern of the model our primary artisan had in his mind. Along with all stone sculptures, Kumarigiri and Kumaragiri hills will be rejuvenated to life in this ceremony as hosts. People of Kalinga who were present in the primary ceremony will come to life in this centenary celebration.

"Kumarigiri and Kumaragiri harbour so many types of sculptural characters. They are *Kama*, *Mahamat*, *Mahasenani*, *Nagara Akhandash*, *Padamulika*, *Dwarapala*, *Dwarapalika*, *Salabhanjika* and innumerable *Gandharba*, *Apsara*, *Yakkha*, *Kinnara*. Humans move in a mortal plane, but we move in an aerial plane. Neither can you touch us, nor can we touch you. You need not be afraid of such elated gatherings and high-spirited events."

The comforting statement of *Salabhanjika* assured the trio. Their fear disappeared. They consoled themselves with the belief that there was nothing to fear. None of them dared to speak to Puspita. Then they looked around and noticed that the configuration of the hills had changed. The caves appeared new and decorated. The mountain's stones were not soiled and discoloured but looked white and sandy. The traditional thick-leaved *nirash* bushes had changed to decorative floral plants. It was no more the hill they had climbed up; its physical appearance had changed to its past form.

Pranabandhu guessed, "Is the vegetation we see now of Kharavela's period?"

Aparti noticed that *Salabhanjika* was receding to her Jaya-Vijay cave below. *Dishidharika* was returning to be in Ganesh Cave with her lamp. It was enough for the first day of the centenary celebration.

Pranabandhu started prompting with a steady voice after the girls left the courtyard, "Don't think of any more function tonight. Whatever we have seen must be accepted as truth and nothing but the truth. We have been invited, no question of danger in future. We have a chance to see something unbelievable and precious. We three promise to keep this matter a top secret and will not allow it to be leaked out."

Raising his right index finger, Abhiram said, "We are lucky that we got this great opportunity. I feel delighted to have seen some glorious events of our ancestors. We should be hopeful of getting glimpses of the location of the Emperor's treasure."

Pranabandhu replied, "Don't expect too much. True tales of the past are more precious than gold and silver. We are fortunate enough to relive the golden era of our land."

Three of them had the same thought: "We postpone our search for a leprosy cure; we may fix it sometime later."

They descended from the foothill of Udayagiri. Now, they begin to feel relaxed by the dawn light. The version of the *Salabhanjika* was trustworthy. The memory of experiencing some glorious past delighted them.

Safely, three perplexed minds returned to their place of rest with the sweet memory of having seen the damsels of the past.

Chapter – 2:

Maidens of Kalinga

The trio was frightened and could not accept the invitation easily. They thought they had heard many stories of ghosts and spirits like this. It could be a spirit that would have caused such an episode. But for reasons unknown, they had to trust *Salabhanjika* for her authentic voice and affectionate invitation. Ghosts, if at all there, have no place in the sacred abode of ascetics. Gradually, their doubts faded, giving place to eagerness to accept the invitation and move forward.

Aparti said assertively, "I feel to be invited to such a celebration is a great opportunity for us. I do not smell a rat on this issue. Why should we lose such a chance?"

Abhirama confirmed, "There is no going back on this. Prepare how we will reach the venue in time. But let me remind you, the whole thing is only confined to us three."

At midnight, they reached the base of the hill. Within moments, the place got crowded. The *Salabhanjikas*, *Dwarapalikas*, and *Swagatikas* were part of the crowd. The lamp-bearing *Dishidharikas* illuminated the mountain to the level of daylight.

The *Salabhanjika* of Jaya Vijaya cave, who had invited these three friends, spotted them at the foothills and rushed down to welcome them. She accompanied them to seats for Apariti and Abhirama in the courtyard of Hathigumpha and sent Pranabandhu with an escort to have a seat opposite Kumaragiri.

The *Salabhanjikas* and the *Swagatikas* are pretty elegant. They are well dressed, courteous and are best suited for guest management. They managed to have people evenly distributed in witness stands of both the hills facing each other. With Lord Risabhanatha's grace, the twin host hills will be rejuvenated to deliver the keynote address. All are eagerly waiting to listen to them. They are waiting for some encouraging indication from the sky, which is not visible at the moment of the full moon night.

The sky turned blue like the clear sky of the day. Kumaragiri shaped himself as a person clad with olive green flora. He is the prince of this natural kingdom, born of nature. He is a disciple of Lord Rama. Temperamentally peaceful, prudent and considerate, the prince is about to stand up to put forth his presentation. Kumarigiri is the princess of this royal house, sitting beside his brother to assist him during this address.

Suddenly, the place became dim as the *Dishidharikas* dimmed their lamps. The moon, too, was shadowed by a vagabond cloud floating by. A small nocturnal bird flew to the west with faint noise, arousing the audience's attention.

Gracefully, Kumaragiri said, "Attention my audience, I am enlightened by the grace of Lord Risabhanatha to deliver this keynote address, which has been given twenty-one times earlier, for which I express my gratitude to Him. Ancient Kalinga has been part of Jambudvipa since Purana times. Life in Kalinga began in the jungles; man was feeling his sociality within himself, but society had not evolved. Mahabharata was yet to happen, and Mahavir and Gautama Buddha were still farther in future. Civil life was awaited at this juncture, and family life was not regular. Society needed social discipline and

higher consciousness. Few great people could attain this to enhance the quality of intuitive judgment to give insight into the vision of humanity.

"Society formation was the target of Lord Risabhanatha established at the top of Kumarigiri, as you all feel today. He is the first of twenty-four Tirthankars in Jain principles. He had laid the foundation of a moral society. He was managing the humanitarian and religious motives of residents of the hinterlands of Kalinga through his school of disciples. Thus, he started a religion of compassion much before *Dwapara Yuga* and earlier than the Vedas appeared, which is rightly mentioned in the Rig Veda.